

CSS
Newsletter

Volume 61
Nos. 1/2/3
Jan/Feb/Mar 2019

Adventures in Frongoch

Pom Pom Passage

Goodbye Harry

Parc Mine

CHELSEA SPELÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY



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ISSN 0045-6381

Cavefest is returning to Crickhowell this year, and Whitewalls will again serve as a base for organised visits to the Llangattock caves. Club members who are available to help out at Whitewalls or guide caving trips please contact Adrian at csssecretary@chelseaspelaeo.org.

*Above: The Antlers, Daren Cilau.
Photo by Jason Gotel.*

*Front Cover: Hillier's Cave, Mendip.
Photo by Matt Voysey.*

Editorial

Once again a big thank you to everyone who sent stories, pictures and material for this edition, please keep it coming! A reminder that photographs are always particularly welcome, be they 'snaps' taken on club trips or good quality photos worthy of a cover, so do send them in.

Please submit all items for publication to cssmattv@gmail.com

Remember that as well as trip reports we welcome items of news or general interest, gear and literature reviews, technical/scientific articles, historical accounts and reminiscences, fun stuff, entertaining stories, and anything else you can come up with. Send high resolution photos in JPG or TIF format. For very large files or collections of items upload them to Dropbox or Google Drive and send me a public shared link to the folder, or ZIP them up and send via MailBigFile.

A **FULL COLOUR** electronic version of this newsletter is available to download from the members area of the club website and the club forum. Also, if you would prefer to go paperless and receive electronic copies of the newsletter in future let me know.

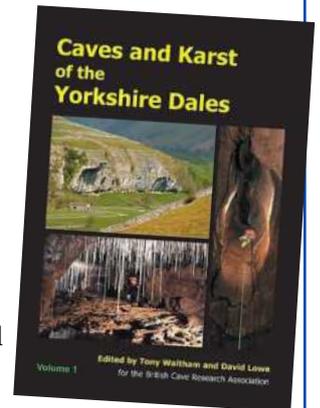
Editor: Matt Voysey
Assistant Editor: Mandy Voysey

New Library Acquisitions

CSS Librarian Paul Tarrant has recently obtained the following books...

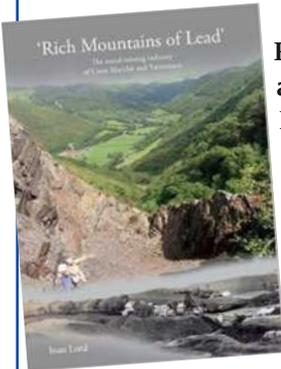
Caves and Karst of the Yorkshire Dales Volume 1 by T. Waltham and D. Lowe

With 264 full colour pages, 165 maps and diagrams and 354 photographs, this book is full of information about a wide spectrum of subjects both above and below ground in the karstic landscape of the Yorkshire Dales. 20 different authors cover topics such as geology, hydrology, cave archaeology, cave formation, limestone pavements and much more.



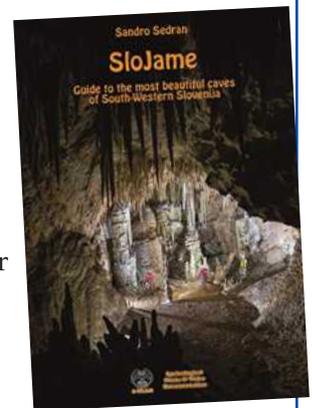
Rich Mountains of Lead - The Metal Mining Industry of Cwm Rheidol and Ysumtuen by Ioan Lord

Not only does this book detail the history of all 40 of the lead, silver and zinc mines in this area of Ceredigion, but also recent discoveries, underground digs, and surveys of the workings, making it of interest to both mine historians and underground enthusiasts alike.



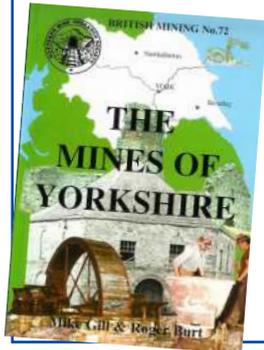
Slojame - A guide to the most beautiful caves of South-Western Slovenija by Sandro Sedran

Contains descriptions of most of the classic caves of the region with details of location and pitches. The book is written in English, with over 350 pages plus hundreds of colour photographs.



Mines of Yorkshire by Mike Gill and Roger Burt

This is a Northern Mines Research Society book which contains all the historic ore production figures of the metaliferrous mines of Yorkshire. This will be of use to anyone hoping to open up any old abandoned adits as the ore figures give an indication of the probable extent of the mine workings.



Membership

Current rates: Full: £30, Joint: £40

Plus BCA subscription per person of £6 for non-cavers and £17 for cavers. Members who have BCA membership via another club need not pay twice but should reference their BCA number and membership club with their payment.

Associate: £18 to receive publications, plus £6 for BCA non-caver insurance.

Provisional: £10 for any 6 months plus BCA active caver insurance to Dec 31st at £4.25 per quarter.

Full membership information and an application form can be downloaded from the CSS website

chelseaspelaeo.org

Please send all subscriptions to:

Andy Heath, 28 Brookfield Road, East Budleigh, Budleigh Salterton, EX9 7EL.



With Mandy and Matt Voysey, Jo Meldner and Barry Lawton.

Frongoch is an old lead and zinc mine situated near Pontrhydygroes in North Ceredigion, and is one of the largest in the area. We knew virtually nothing about this mine prior to our trip and had no idea what to expect, so we were pleasantly surprised by the diversity of features we encountered on our voyage of discovery. The adit entrance to this mine is right next to the road, but apparently this is a very wet and unpleasant route in. Fortunately a laddered route has been engineered to enter the workings just beyond this nastiness.

Beneath the entrance hatch, the journey into Frongoch starts with a fairly long fixed ladder, leading on to further shorter ladder climbs before reaching the mine passage below. The water in this passage wasn't particularly deep, but looked like it could be significantly higher at times. Despite being the tallest member of our party, Barry wasn't taking any chances and insisted on keeping to the rear in order to use the rest of us as mobile depth gauges, ready to spring into retreat or climb over us if needs must. Luckily this proved to be unnecessary and we splashed on down the tunnel with ease, admiring the intermittent areas of stal we passed on our way. These were mostly in the form of either big yellow smooth coatings on the rock, or a more knobbly black and orange variety, and were interesting in being different to the kinds of formations we would usually see.

Then, after a pleasant and roomy chamber with some creepy toys and yet more splashing down mined passage, we reached a junction. Here we turned right, and shortly after came across an old metal kibble and the long hooked bar that would have been used to pull it across when lowered down the shaft. Just beyond this was Boundary Shaft, now completely orange with rust and chock full of all kinds of scrap metal and car parts. There was no way anything could be lowered down this shaft nowadays, as both above and below was

completely full of interesting, but doom-laden suspended matter. Even Matt only danced about on it briefly before moving on, and Barry (later to be dubbed "Safety Barry") was having none of it.

Just beyond this was another junction with mushrooms growing on a stemple nearby. Here we again turned right where the next point of interest was a flooded stope with a timber catwalk and a traverse line alongside. Here the water was very blue, and very deep. The stope continued downwards further than the eye could see, and had the ghostly shapes of all the old timberwork still in-situ far below. We liked this a lot, but there was more watery business to come...

Just a short distance further we came to another body of water, but this one had a limp looking inflatable dinghy on its rocky shores, and even better, a pump to inflate it with. Though we realised this pool of water could easily be crossed without the aid of a vessel, it looked like the further end of it could possibly be about waist deep and we were



photos by Jo Meldner and Matt Voysey

keen to keep dry if possible. We also just liked the idea of using the boat as it was an element of fun we hadn't expected. Jo immediately sprang into action as soon as she saw it, and a vigorous pumping session ensued. We all took turns and pumped for what felt like an eternity before we realised the lack of inflation was mostly due to punctures in both the main body and the bottom tubes of the dinghy. Neither of these were holding air for long, but a third inner section seemed to be faring better so we thought we'd give it a try anyway. Amazingly our mission was a success! With a bit of extra pumping between journeys, we had all made it across dry. We were well chuffed... well, until we got around the next bend and saw the real reason why the boat would have been brought in.

Ahead of us was a flooded stope around 15 metres long, with some very, very deep water and no dry way of crossing. There was a traverse line rigged against one wall, but with no ledges this only provided a means to pull across while in the water. We paused to analyse the situation, and Barry very sensibly pointed out the hazards involved in attempting a crossing with what was essentially just a floppy piece of plastic doomed to fail. We listened to reason... but then decided to ignore it in favour of fun and exploration. There was a rope to hold on to after all, and Jo was already attempting to re-inflate the dinghy. Liking the idea of a nautical challenge, I volunteered to make the first crossing and quickly hopped aboard and pulled across while there was still air enough to make it. This went better than expected... until I got wedged in a narrowing and snagged on the rocks. Luckily there was a handy ledge of rock that I could use to disembark and from there scamper across to the other side. The boat was returned victorious and ready for the next adventurer, while I nosed on ahead.

The next obstacle was a deep circular pool of water with a plank to get across, and beyond this a short section of easy walking passage followed a



very long section of flooded stopes. There were more wooden catwalks in place to traverse along the first bit, but what followed was just a long stretch of deep wetness, too narrow for the dinghy to cross and definitely unwise to attempt in one so deflated. There were also stemples crossing the stope very close to the water-line for an additional obstacle challenge, so I think probably the best way of continuing further would be just to swim it in a wetsuit and buoyancy aid. Apparently there's not much to explore beyond, but there are lots of miners' clog prints in the mud that would be very nice to see.

Jo was the next bold adventurer to make the crossing, and was at the ledge when I returned. As there wasn't much more we could do here, we decided the best plan would be to head back and check out the other routes. Jo then jumped back into the dinghy, launched with aplomb, then slid straight over the side and into the water with a mighty splash. This was just what Barry feared would happen, but luckily she still had hold of the



rope and was swiftly pulled ashore by Barry and Matt. It turns out that it takes more than a surprise dunking in freezing cold water to dampen Jo's natural ebullience, so she was perfectly happy to carry on with the trip. We used our boat/colourful pancake once more to cross the first pool, then went back to mushroom junction to take the other route. The next interesting section we encountered was a climbing rise heading up from a small chamber on the left. This was a series of narrow, sturdy ladders, leading up to the "14 Fathom Level", where we found a beautifully decorated passage with an abundance of really fine white curtains with frilly dog-toothed edges, and mini-gours with crystals. We weren't expecting to see anything like this in the mine, so we were all really pleased.

Returning to the main passage we continued onwards, wriggled through stacked bags of spoil, and dropped into yet more ongoing passage. This was lower, greyer, and wetter than before, but eventually popped out into a mud floored chamber. This had an area that was taped off to protect clog prints in the mud left by the miners of old. Many of these were really clear, and some were so small that they must be the prints of children. Copper was obviously present in the rock around here, as there were a number of blue formations in this chamber too.

We were almost at the conclusion of our journey, but we still had one of the main attractions to come. Continuing past the chamber we felt that a surface connection must be close as we kept spotting frogs and flies in the water. Then we found the Engine Shaft. This is unusual in that it still has pump rods in place, along with various other bits of metal and timber that would once have served a working purpose within the shaft. Nearby a small passage had some nice artefacts, including a wooden wheelbarrow and a very weighty spanner. Beyond this was a long, flat out dig that none of us really fancied pushing to conclusion, so we headed back out and checked out any side routes that we'd missed along the way.

All in all, this was an excellent trip. There was much more to Frongoch than any of us expected, and we all enjoyed the diversity of the passages, formations, artefacts and water-based fun we encountered. Many thanks to Matt, Barry, and Jo for making this such a fun outing.



Frongoch Location Information

Frongoch Mine is about a 10 min drive from the Devil's Bridge Falls at Pontarfynach, near Aberystwyth, located part way along the minor road between the villages of Pont-rhyd-y-groes and Abermagwr. The best place to park is at a bend in the road next to some ruined mine buildings. From here the easiest approach to Frongoch is to walk down the road to the Adit Entrance, then follow the cutting uphill to find the fenced compound of the Adit Shaft Entrance. The entrance is covered but not locked.

Parking: SN 7158 7418

Adit Shaft Entrance: SN 7138 7427

Changes to OFD 1 Access

There is a new access route to the OFD 1 entrance. Please do not take the previous path down from the road as this leads to private land that cavers are not permitted to cross, instead continue downhill another 350 metres (just past Powell's Cave) and climb the metal gate on your right. From here the path may not be clearly defined, but there are orange tape markers to show the way. If in doubt about which route to take, ask at Penwyllt.

A schoolboy's introduction to squalor, darkness and adrenaline

by Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley

We often read about cavers' latest exploits, their favourite trips, expeditions they've been on, breakthroughs they've been involved with, cave science, bar room caving and other similar interests, but it would be interesting to hear about the diverse ways in which people were drawn into the sport.

My first trip was 50 years ago in 1969 when, as a spotty-faced, snotty-nosed 13 year old pupil at Clifton College in Bristol I was introduced to the muddy delights that lie beneath the Mendip hills.

As I recall there were six of us on the trip. Late in the afternoon our housemaster drove us to Burrington Combe, pointed out the entrances to Goatchurch Cavern and Sidcot Swallet, then headed off, declaring that he would pick us up at 10pm sharp.

Our leaders, two older boys with a few trips under their belts, boasted well-used Oldham lamps; a couple of the less venerated boys had Premier 'Stinky' carbides. The rest of us had to make do with candles!

Sporting a motley selection of compressed-cardboard and Texolex helmets and hand-me-down clothing we threaded our army-booted way underground, illuminated by our faint, tangerine glow.

By the time we surfaced from Goatchurch my woollen battledress trousers were torn at the knees, the white Aran sweater that my mother had knitted for me some weeks before

weighed a ton, had that distinctive ochreous hue that we all know so well and was shredded at the elbows (there was hell to pay when it also shrank in the hot-wash as I tried to remedy the damage!).

We then ventured into Sidcot Swallet where the climb out of the Lobster Pot posed a magnificently entertaining challenge to those of us brandishing candles in our hands.

When 10pm arrived I was hot, sweaty, grazed, sooty, burnt, covered in wax and completely hooked on this spectacular new sport.

The trip was a revelation and the way in which we, strictly-ruled schoolkids, were left to our own devices was much appreciated and surely could not be repeated in today's stifflingly litigious, Health and Safety-obsessed society.

Some weeks later I had my introduction to caving in the Yorkshire Dales, on a school trip down Sunset Hole in Chapel-le-Dale. Illumination this time was greatly improved, as our local guide provided us with helmets, furry-ended belay belts and miners' lamps. The downside of this was that my aged, battle-scarred cell leaked battery acid down my back and I spent the evening in a local surgery having treatment for a blister the size of a saucer on my lower back and arse.

Happy days!



HRC Daren Camps 2019

3rd-5th May (Bank Holiday weekend)

14th-16th June

9th-11th August

27th-29th September

8th-10th November

The main focus of the upcoming camps will be our dig sites at Half Mile Passage and Beyond Time. New diggers are always welcome.

Contact Mandy mandola76@gmail.com or Adrian adrianfawcett@outlook.com for more details.

Mendip Meanderings

by Nick Chipchase



Vurley Swallet - Not long after the discovery of the pitches (11m, 20m and 2x10m), the CO₂ levels in Vurley started to climb again, pretty much putting an end to further exploration at the bottom some 150m down. I spent much of August 2018 building up the area below the entrance pipes with concrete, cement and finally dry stone walling. That month the CO₂ was at 3.5% at the 11m pitch, though that level affected people differently. One of the team became ill for two days after that exposure whilst others had headaches the next day. In any case it was felt that climbing pitches in such an environment was not a good idea. So the survey remains uncompleted and we have not even sorted out the pitch names either.

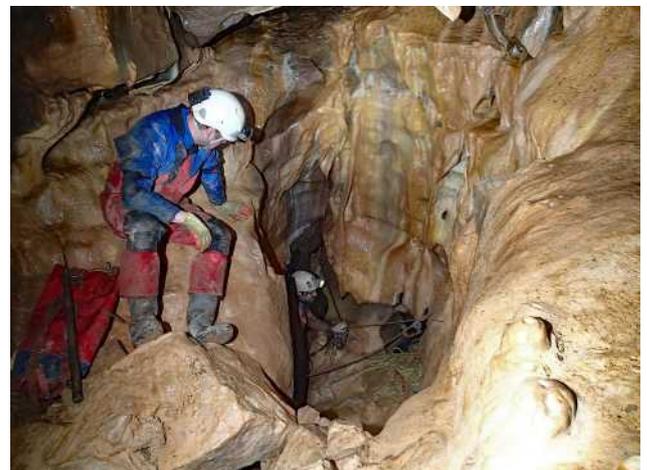
Reservoir Hole - December saw us back in Jill's Slither dig in Reservoir where we had installed a light conveyor belt to run along the dig. Epic work was done at the end by Mike Kushy but basically, for now, the passage has sumped. We have not given up as yet as water still drains away into the distance. Whilst this was going on Peter Glanvill and I decided to try to follow the stream sinking in Chain Chamber. Strangely this does not reappear anywhere else lower down. For the moment we have reached a stal floor 2m down with the stream running down a hole against the wall. Several litres poured down in one go rattles off down to unknown parts.



Mandy sings the backing music for the Shatter film

Fairy Cave Quarry - In mid-January I was at Fairy Cave Quarry filming with Antonia and Andy Freem. I was there for four days and Mandy and Matt came along for a day or two. I think the idea was to offset the idea that only people over 65 do the most caving. We spent eight and a half hours in Shatter Cave on one day and filmed Fernhill on another day. The whole thing was a revelation to me as Andy Freem is very well versed in cave cryogenics and had the patience to explain things when asked. They certainly did not want a film of cave pretties and much was done around cryogenic stal, conservation and exploration. I was most impressed with the results of stal cleaning and repair and hope this will be an ongoing process at the quarry. Withyhill was attempted on day four, but Andy felt that the process was unsatisfactory and decided to return at another time.

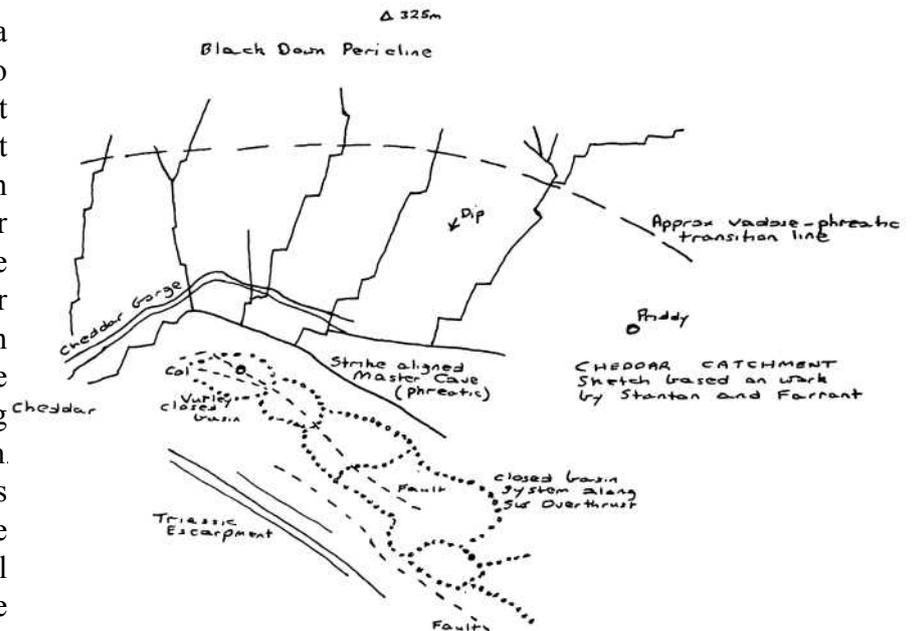
Reservoir Hole - Back in Reservoir, Mike Kushy decided to climb the big aven next to Pulsation Aven. Peter and I joined him up there at the beginning of February when Mike capped a way into new passage - the first real discovery in Reservoir Hole for a long time. I was ill at the time but managed to take some photos as Peter's camera battery was flat. There is an awkward traverse (nicely rigged) and an ascending series of rifts. All horribly awkward, as well as bitterly cold, but that might have been the result of my virus which I promptly passed on to Peter and his wife.



Chamber at the top of the aven in Reservoir Hole and the start of the traverse to the new area

Fairy Cave Quarry - In mid-February Andy and Antonia returned to complete the filming of Withyhill. Again Mandy and Matt came along for that. Withyhill was superb. The dryness of late Summer was gone and there were pools and wet stal everywhere. A long day resulted in some astonishing footage so I was told. I still felt ill but managed to look perky in one or two shots. A smaller team returned on Sunday to film a special reconstruction project in W/L Cave. I cannot say what as it will all be in the film. We nearly had to abandon that as when we looked at the project back in January the area was dry. This time there was a small pond. In fact, like Withyhill, all the formations were wet and sparkling enabling us to do a good deal of cleaning. One forgets how special W/L Cave is as well as the other caves. It is, of course, the main Shatter conduit originating under the stal in Crystal Chamber in Balch Cave. I think the quarry cave film is going to be something very special, such is the dedication of the filming team to get everything absolutely just right.

Vurley Swallet - Back in January a small brave team bottomed Vurley to cap a boulder in the floor. The CO₂ at the 11m pitch was still showing just under 3%. Sadly there was no open way under the boulder without further work, nor was there an open way where the stream sinks. Nothing unusual for Vurley as we have arrived at such blockages several times. In any case the cave is still some 50m above the rising level with a depth potential of 200m. Not bad for Mendip. The SRT purists seem to have relented so possibly the 20m pitch will be laddered with a small platform half way down where the deviation is now. That depends on CO₂ readings which at the time of writing are decreasing slightly.



Vurley Swallet and Cheddar Catchment Survey



Shatter Cave entrance in the 1970's. The cave was first found back in 1969, so this year is the 50th Anniversary of its discovery.



Nick at Withyhill at its time of discovery in 1972

Photos by Nick Chipchase

Epocalypse Chokes Daren Cilau

by Steve Sharp

Cavers – Steve Sharp, Adrian Fawcett, Tony Moulton and Emyr Walters

Ever since I joined CSS I've always wanted to go to the Epocalypse Chokes but somehow never managed it, but this weekend the plan was to make a special trip. Our journey took us through Busman's as we didn't want to get wet through the crawl. We took the usual route, which is a very pleasant trip if you've never been into Daren Cilau. We had a quick look at Urchin Oxbow and The Antlers, and then made our way up to the chokes. When we got there I could not believe the scale of this part of the cave. I had previously been told this was where the main digging effort had taken place in the 1980's before the major dig started from the Hard Rock Café which broke into the further reaches of the cave.

With today's modern lights Epocalypse shone like a cathedral with so many prospects on offer. There have been many previous digging attempts here, but the draught is very strong and I've no doubt the passage continues.

We all explored the various passages and side passages, but one of the main features is a rather large hole in the floor into an extremely large passage. Adrian had brought a ladder so we could climb down and take a look. As we reached the lower passage the scale became very apparent, Adrian was pleasantly surprised as he couldn't remember this section. We walked both up and down the passage, which has a stream along its length.

I plan to return to Epocalypse with my camera to take some shots and hopefully make this a new dig site. I would encourage anyone who has not been to this part of the cave to make the effort to visit. Hopefully there will be some interest and a collective effort to dig in this part of the system could be undertaken and logged. I think it will take more than one digging team to achieve, but if a breakthrough is made it will be something for everyone to see.



Tony at The Antlers



Urchin formations

Fun Fact

For anyone wondering why the Epocalypse Chokes are so named, apparently the reason is that on the day of its discovery by Martyn Farr, Clive Gardener and Paul Tarrant, Martyn's horoscope had said that he was "coming to the end of an epoch".

Pant Mawr Pot

by Jennie Lawrence



19th August 2018

The Team: Jann Padley (rigger), Paddy Wilson (rigger), Martin Lloyd (cave locator) and Jennie Lawrence (photographer).

Pant Mawr Pot is an impressive and picturesque 33 metre shaft in a large shake hole which drops into an impressively large and well decorated passage. This continues for over 1 km reaching a sump, which was dived to 122 metres ending in a choke.

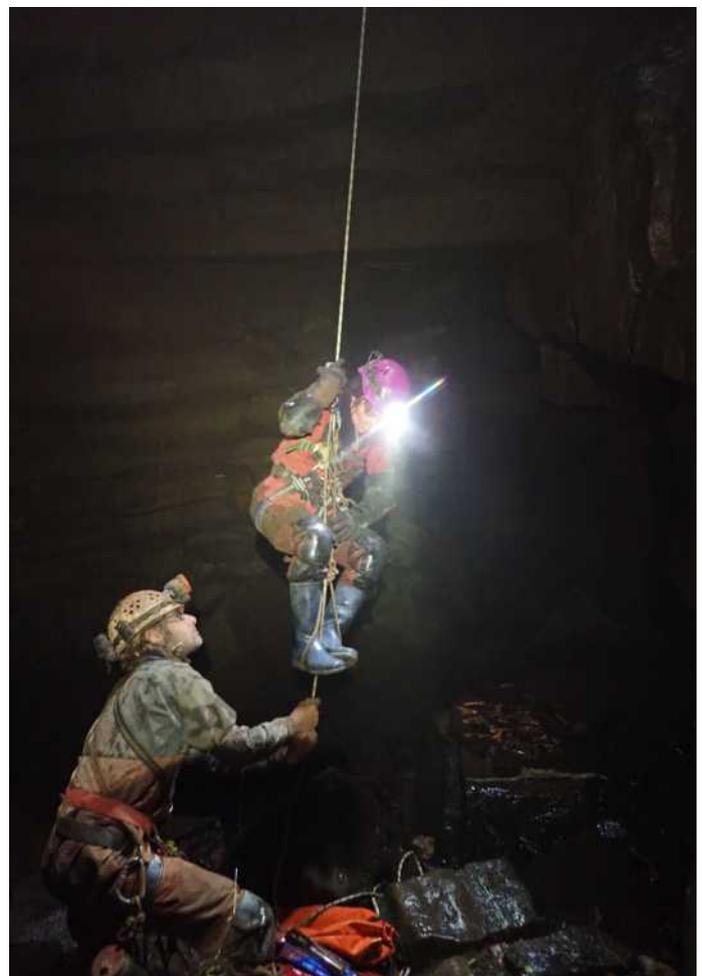
On arrival at South Wales Caving Club we filled out our 'ticket' with a return time of 17.00 hours. Pant Mawr Pot is on the moor about a 4 km walk from the clubhouse. We set off following Martin using his GPS, the moor was misty so visibility was poor. After several lively discussions involving the direction of the cave, we arrived at the entrance shaft an hour and a half later. A handline was rigged from the fencing to the ledge, then a belay on the ledge for the 30 metre pitch.

We descended, the first part against a wall then a magnificent free hang into the huge passageway. Following upstream we passed the first boulder choke via a hole on the right. After a short distance we bypassed the second boulder choke via an oxbow on the right re-joining the streamway, then continued over large boulders past a stalactite curtain.

We climbed up through the third boulder choke, all choosing various routes some more gnarly than others! We arrived in the Great Hall, we were running short of time so didn't climb up to the well decorated Organ Loft but continued along the passage. We could hear loud water, 'The Fire Hydrant' which is water joining the main stream from a side passage. We turned back so as not to miss our call out time, admiring formations on the way.

An enjoyable trip was had by all, we just wished we had had more time to reach the sump and explore.

A large toad met us on exiting! (which I managed to resist kissing having heard an 8 year old acquired salmonella after doing this). We arrived back at SWCC just in time, taking just an hour and via a different route using a track. We proceeded to the Ancient Briton for beer and chips a fine end to a day's ~~walking~~ caving.



Parc Mine

by Chris Tomlin

2nd March 2019. Matt Chinner, me, the Voyseys, Andy Heath.

This was a North Wales weekend staying in the Karabiner Mountaineering Club's giant hut near Llanberis. It was the powder store for the nearby slate mines, so it is strongly built with outward-opening steel doors, and it has a view to rival that of Whitewalls. I came up to join the Voyseys and Andy Heath who had been braving the weather to do some walking, and Matt Chinner met us on the Saturday morning to do the Parc Lead Mine. I gather that the mine was last worked in the 1950s but parts were much older.

Anyway we started off on a grim Saturday morning, driving up a narrow road to park next to Hafna Lead Mine just north of Betwys-y-Coed. There were lots of mountain bikers around, we were on or next to a popular trail. So after a short walk downhill past several holes and around an impressive blockhouse capping a big shaft, we entered Parc Mine via a level through shallow water, this was I think Level 1, the highest level in the mine (there are levels 2, 2a, 3, 4 and 5 beneath it). After some easy walking and a right turn at a T-junction with a dodgy concrete false floor (and a large drop visible through the gap in the floor) we went on, and then through a dog-kennel-like box crawl, to emerge at the side of a big shaft (possibly the one under the blockhouse) with pump rods and balance bobs (I think) left over from the 19th century operations. Although the downward continuation of the shaft seemed blocked at our level, the large rising mains coming up through the fill must mean there must be further workings below (there are). We continued along the level on the rails left in place and past many wooden ore chutes. It was plain that this level was largely a glorified ledge in a large open stope that went up a long way and down even further, with the odd ladder heading upwards but they only went higher in the stope. There were a lot of gaps in the false floor enabling us to see the drop, I was grateful for having a fairly feeble light for once. On and on we went, through another dog kennel in a collapse, and turned around where the continuation was hands and knees for a few

feet, but we didn't get to the end of the level.

We got back to the false floor and sat down for a bite to eat where there were a lot of shallow holes drilled in the rock, it looked like a training area for rock drillers, perhaps when the mine was operating. After this we saw a giant shaft with pumping apparatus in it, and also the remains of a laboratory that was used for tidal influence experiments after the mine closed, not much left of the apparatus but it's a good story. Around the corner we abseiled down a fixed rope for about 5m, trying not to notice that the 'belay' for the rope was two old air pipes on the side of the adit, and then we slid down a timber ore chute and a short ladder to I think level 2A. I went up a 3m climb into another, draughting, level that went on, I turned around after a minute or two and re-joined the others where a larger adit split into three and ended in barren ground. There was also a climbing shaft going upwards here with ladders in place but we didn't go up this. After this we went a long way down more fixed ladders to Level 2, which was the main accessible level in the mine and the lowest level that is not flooded. The tunnels were very high here and there were a lot of them, with loops for the rail system that is still in place throughout. There is a car bogey at one point and an enormous body of an ore cart somewhere else, like a very large bathtub. Again we went upstream and passed a flooded internal incline down to Level 3. There was a lot



Photos by Matt Voysey except group shot by helpful passer by

of water flowing through this level and a lot of ore chutes. Going along the level we were able to look up the large stopes and presumably Level 1 is up there somewhere. After a few hundred metres of walking we began to get into deeper water where debris partially blocked the level. The water behind the second blockage was waist-deep and it was clear from the 'tide marks' on the wall that it had been much deeper in the past, it would have been sumped in places. The reward for this sporting wade was a cluster of very impressive snottites, patterned mud and formations looking very like calcite on a cluster of pipework just past the deep bit. A bit further on we came to a large junction and second flooded incline down to Level 3. We turned around at this point although we were not at the end but there were noticeably fewer footprints past the deep water. I gave Mandy a piggyback through some of the deep water but nearly dropped her in, not my finest moment.

According to some internet information, these levels were driven for about two miles and Matt C reckons that at least one of the levels comes out on a far hillside somewhere to the west of the entrance. What did they do with all the spoil?

After a long tramp back down the level and through a pipe that goes through a large concrete barrier, we got to the mine portal. Water here was less deep than the deep bit further in. I went through an eyehole on the left into a pool that was not as deep as it looked but it had boulders in it, ouch. Then we pioneered an 'alternative' exit up through open workings to the surface proper. Matt C led the climbs on this, there certainly were some thin moves and there was not much grip with a plastic oversuit. Andy and I 'helped' by trying to get a rotten tree in position for Matt to use, but it was too short and would have been painful had he landed on it. Glad he had a rope for the rest of us, I didn't fancy those climbs! Then a walk back to the car in heavy rain and past several more gated adits and barred shafts, this place is hollow. I don't know what chemicals or minerals are in the mine water, but it is a very tan/orange colour when disturbed and I still had orange feet a week later!



Right: The desperate climb to freedom. Matt C since learned of a much easier exit route climbing up beneath the fenced viewing platform at the opposite end of the working.

More work on the ODSS

8th – 10th February 2019

by Mike Read

Friday - Heavy rain on Thursday night, continuing on Friday morning, rapidly led to a decision that a trip beyond the 2nd Choke in Aggy was not a good idea and neither was a survey trip in Craig-a-Ffynnon. So we set to work on the Sunday School. When we installed the steel lintels we were nervous about removing some protruding stones, fearing we would lose the support for the lintels and would not have time to make good and return some stability by the end of the weekend. Not wanting to completely engulf the building in dust we ruled out using the angle grinder, this would have required numerous cuts due to the thickness and size of the stones hence we resulted to drilling and splitting. Some rocks behaved, but others refused to split where we had drilled them. Anyway, we did eventually succeed, and then set about tidying up the wall end.

This was a slow process as water was seeping in through the external stone (inspection shows we have a lot of re-pointing to do) and from the temporary porch roof, which made the mortar rather wet and sloppy. We also laid the first course of blocks for the shower wall, and temporarily installed the strip light supplied by Gary, which made working indoors far easier. The only down side was when we switched everything off at the end of the day and went outside it was very dark. I had great fun trying to push the wheelbarrow up the slope in the mud without being able to see anything, but somehow I eventually arrived at the tram road, just not where I expected.

Saturday - This morning was brighter, but with more rain forecast we decided that it was still not prudent to head up north in Aggy and opted to continue on the Sunday School internal walls instead. We continued making good the stone wall below the steel lintels and laying blocks on the shower wall. We also modified the front door so that it would still open with the toilet wall in place. The call to go underground increased and by 15:00 could not be contained any longer, so we headed to Cnwc. John was keen to look at a passage on the right-hand side that he had started to survey. This is definitely a collector's piece!! I understand it was originally pushed by Martyn Farr who must be keener on tight squeezes than us. John took the lead and enlarged some of the tightest bits whilst I followed, enlarging them to an even more respectable size. With a late start and beer/food calling we had to turn round at the point where a blue cord was tied to the roof and continued along the passage. I've yet to work out the purpose of the cord, but it will no doubt become apparent when we return. On the way out we decided to undertake a grade 1.5-ish survey. We recorded the length to John's previous survey point as 152 crowbars, plus 8 of my body lengths. Exiting the enlarged, but still small in places, passage was much easier. We also added a handline to the climb up into this passage, which is especially useful when exiting. Trip length 5.5hrs.

Exeter Uni were staying at the cottage, and on our return we learnt that they had managed to break off the key in the Aggy lock. There were discussions about whether the blame could be placed on a rampant sheep attacking them whilst they were trying to turn the key, but in reality it would appear that the key was slightly bent. They tried straightening it but it "came off in their hands" when trying to open the lock.



Mike and John working on the Sunday School

Sunday - John walked over to Aggy with pliers and a spare key to do battle with the lock (anything to get out of more block laying). He returned for a coffee break and explained that he couldn't pull out the broken key so had resorted to pushing it in further, enabling him to use the stub end to open the lock and retrieve the padlock. Taking the padlock apart kept John from any work on the Sunday School for a good while.

He methodically removed and marked bits of the lock, making full use of Whitewalls' extensive workshop. Returning after laying more blocks I found that even after more coffee and biscuits the broken key was still wedged firmly in the barrel. It was finally decided to drill a small hole in the end of the barrel, then using precision percussion equipment (hammer and panel pin) the key eventually gave up and could be extracted using pliers.



A view of John's workstation

I left John to reassemble the lock whilst I returned to block laying. The broken key had caused burrs/scratches within the lock but having no needle files we were unable to resolve this, the result being that only a truly straight key could easily be extracted (as was found out by the BEC the following weekend). A replacement and more lock maintenance will be done shortly.

Addendum: A shiny replacement padlock (taking the same key) was fitted 24th Feb.



John testing out the cubicle with an imaginary toilet

ODSS Working Events 2019

April 26th-28th - Scaffolding Weekend

The plan this weekend is to install all the scaffolding needed and get everything ready for the big re-roofing project.

May 24th-June 2nd - Re-roofing Week

A whole week of working activity, with the primary objective of dismantling and rebuilding the Sunday School roof with a steel lintel and new roof rafters. Other tasks include fitting the insulation and constructing the mezzanine levels.

This is quite a mammoth task and a major stepping stone in making the ODSS a habitable accommodation. All help will be gratefully received, whether you are a skilled builder, a keen demolisher, handy with a tool kit or just good at making tea.

For further information or to confirm that you can come please contact John Stevens or Mike Read. Any donations towards the cost of the works will be gratefully received by the CSS Treasurer.



Pom Pom Passage OFD II

23 February 2019

Joe Duxbury, Adrian Fawcett, Mandy Voysey, Matt Voysey, Emyr Walters

This trip was all Mandy's idea – she wanted to see the famous Pom Pom after watching a Dudley CC video. The five of us drove to SWCC, Adrian managing to overtake Emyr without anybody in either car noticing. Going into the cave by Cwm Dwr was a novelty – I hadn't been in that entrance for ages. We had a bit of difficulty in the Cwm Dwr boulder choke, but eventually arrived at The Confluence. After going upstream for a while, we came to the first 'escape point' (at the Fault Aven Series), and climbed up into a side passage (with varying amounts of struggling) with the help of a scaffold bar.

We soon came to the crux of the way to Pom Pom Passage, the rope trick. This involves tying a rope to a loop of string going through two eye-bolts, and managing to thread the said rope through them.

Adrian's first attempt didn't work, but when he tried pulling in the opposite direction, with some manful tugging, the rope went through. It was then used to haul a 9m ladder up to the eye-bolts, and was tied off to another pair of bolts at the bottom. Adrian went up the ladder first, and then fixed it more securely with a krab.

At the top of the pitch the passage went steeply up to a crossroads. Adrian's black and white copy of the survey said that this should be H Junction, but we could see no obvious 'H' to confirm it. We followed passages in both directions, but nothing got us anywhere useful. Back at the crossroads, we took the only remaining passage straight ahead across a deep drop. We followed this to a climb up through a hole into the bottom of a passage going two ways. Straight on went to a corner with a climb through and then under a fine false floor. Beyond this was a really hairy traverse over a deep hole, bringing us to a T Junction. Right at the junction the passage was soon blocked by a giant sand bank, while left opened out into the impressive Fault Aven Chamber.

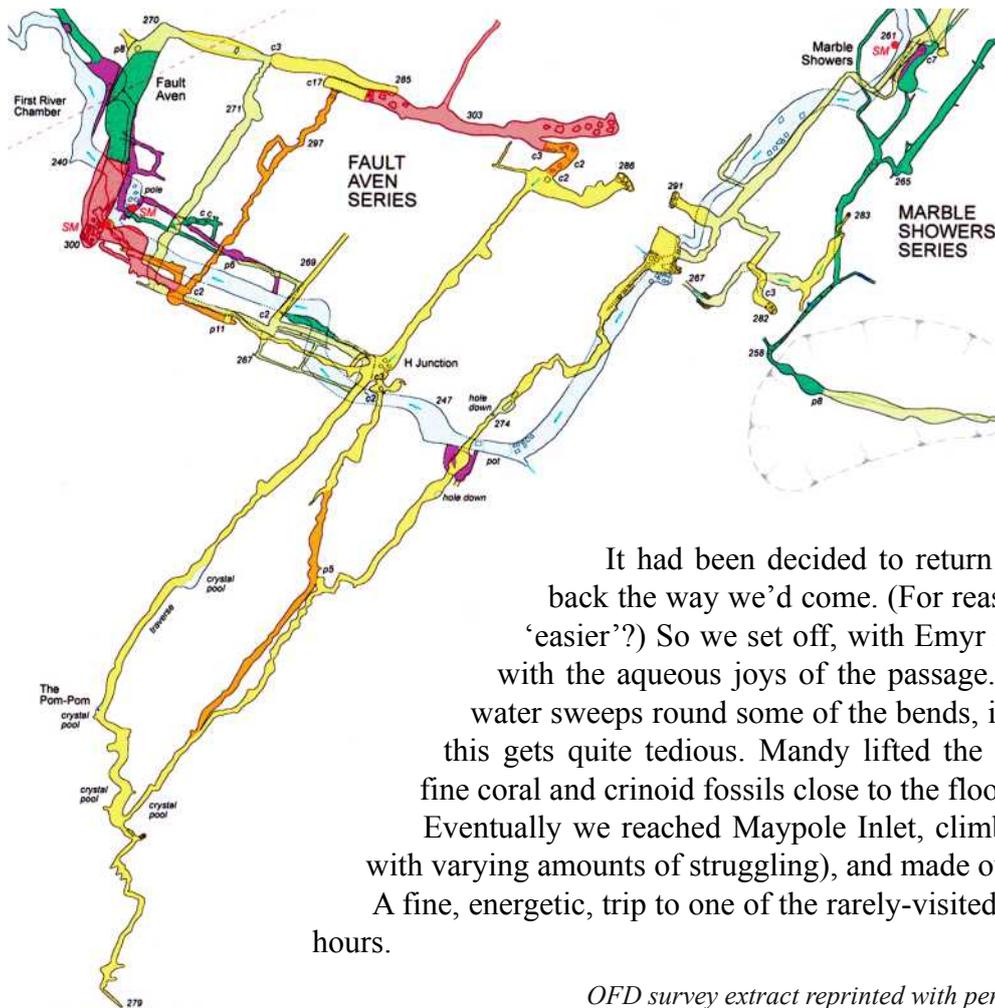
Back at the climb up, we went the other way to a junction, where the straw formation in the shape of a reversed 'h' strongly suggested that this was, in fact, H Junction! Now the survey told us which was Pom Pom Passage, starting as traverses high above the main streamway. Eventually the floor rose to meet us, and we dropped down into the long straight approach to the Pom Pom itself, just before the first left-hand bend. Continuing to the end of this passage, we came to a nicely-decorated grotto, and another passage entering almost behind us. We followed this, traversing in places to avoid various calcite formations. When we got to a deep, wide hole, we turned back.

The survey showed a shorter passage, going diagonally back to H Junction, which Adrian and Emyr found, but the rest of us missed it and followed what turned out to be an oxbow back to the Pom Pom.



by Joe Duxbury

Pom Pom photo courtesy of Brendan Marris (our team photographer accidentally left the camera at Whitewalls!)



Anyway, we all met back up at H Junction, and took another way back to the ladder. This took us along a passage laced with veins of gypsum, with piles of gypsum dust on the floor. We descended the ladder and derigged in a most efficient manner, then made our way back to the Main Stream.

It had been decided to return up the streamway, rather than back the way we'd come. (For reasons of variety? Because it was 'easier'?) So we set off, with Emyr and Adrian off in front, coping with the aqueous joys of the passage. Despite the beautiful way the water sweeps round some of the bends, if you're only 'in transit', I find this gets quite tedious. Mandy lifted the monotony by pointing out the fine coral and crinoid fossils close to the floor.

Eventually we reached Maypole Inlet, climbed up out of the water (again, with varying amounts of struggling), and made our way to Top Entrance.

A fine, energetic, trip to one of the rarely-visited splendours of OFD. About 5¾ hours.

OFD survey extract reprinted with permission of South Wales Caving Club. The ascent route into Fault Aven Series from the streamway is at the point marked 'pole' in the top left.

SMWCRT Rescue Practices

Sat 30th May - Rescue Practice (Gwent area)

Sat 17th August - Mid-Wales Mine Rescue Practice

Sat 5th October - Venue and scenario TBC

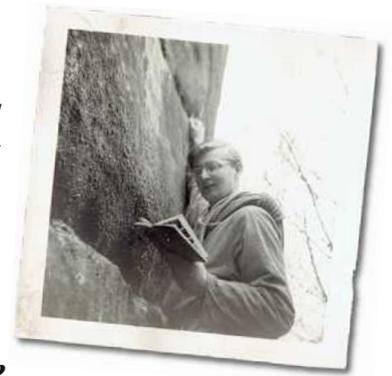
Sat 30th November - Big OFD Practice, Penwyllt

For up to date information regarding the venue and focus of the above events see the team's website at www.smwcrt.org or speak to CSS members Paul Tarrant, Dan Thorne, Lisa Boore or Tom Foord. All practices run from 9:30-17:00 including briefings.

All members are welcome to partake in these events and learn about all aspects of cave rescue from the SMWCRT team. Whatever your skill set there will be something useful to do and plenty to learn.



We are sad to report that Harry Pearman passed away in February aged 84. He was a founding member of CSS and also a keen explorer of underground environments in the South East of England. Harry produced many publications on chalk mines and these continue to sell and broadcast the name of CSS in an extremely positive light today. He is survived by his wife Heather and two sons.



Goodbye, Harry

by Roy Musgrove

As one of the few remaining members who knew Harry Pearman in his active days, I would like to share some recollections of him.

He was a founder member of CSS many decades ago, and, according to Fred Topliffe, was a driving force from the beginning of CSS. Certainly persistence when pursuing his interests was a characteristic of all he did.

At the time when he was investigating secret tunnels in the Home Counties by means of day or evening visits he was probably the only person researching deneholes, stone mines and the like. The resulting publications inspired others to follow in his footsteps, and although he later left them to carry on the work, he remained interested in underground features of non-caving areas. It is also worth remarking that he took the trouble to record and publish his findings. In the early days that took quite an effort. These volumes were produced on a turn-the-handle duplicator at the World's End Community Centre where CSS had its headquarters. There was a communal effort to assist Harry to print, collate and staple them and he also took on the sales.

He had a great ability to get on with everyone whose path he crossed and I doubt he had an enemy in the world. As a result of his reputation in his chosen field an unusual event took place. When a collapse occurred in front of a front door on a new housing development at Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, the residents asked Harry to look into it. (Sorry, couldn't resist). A group of us met at the site and belayed a ladder to a street lighting column. A couple of visits sufficed to map what was clearly an old stone excavation. Adjacent to the collapse was a road leading to the hospital laundry, for which plans to rebuild had just been approved. By the simple expedient of driving an iron rod into the verge Harry showed that the distance from top of tarmac to top of mine passage was just five feet, and the plans had to be substantially revised.

How much preparatory work he had done before our visits, only he knew, but he had obviously formulated a plan of what needed doing and how to do it before the rest of us set out. The residents were sufficiently grateful to give a significant sum to Harry for his work. Being Harry, he looked to CSS interests. He had established that whenever the government department responsible for old mine plans moved, a few more plans were lost. He therefore spent the donation on the set of the Brendon Hills Iron Mines, which now rest in the club library.

Another of his projects was the Findon Roman Well in Sussex. One day a tractor dropped into a pit in a field on



Harry exiting from the original Agen Allwedd entrance in 1955



Harry Pearman, Peter Graham and Stan Spencer at the Old Daren Sunday School. 13th August 1956

the edge of the Downs at Findon. As the expert with caving resources, Harry was invited to excavate it on behalf of the archaeologists. Thus began a monthly exercise on summer Sundays which was to last several years. Initially descent was down a caving ladder, but by about 90 feet this became very time-consuming and Harry obtained from somewhere or other a WW II barrage balloon winch, turned by two people. This too became problematic in terms of time needed and effort required, and towards the end of the dig he resorted to using a four-wheel drive crossing the field to lower and raise diggers down finally to about 250 feet. I can't remember how long this lasted – around ten years I think – and I am willing to bet that Harry was the only person who attended all the working days.

Harry's other great trait was a wonderful dry humour. He entertained us at the 21st Anniversary dinner with a talk about the controversy over rung spacing on caving ladders, 10 inches or 12 inches. This was illustrated by short bits of ladder that he had prepared for the talk, which did things like changing spacing in the middle, or all the rungs collapsing to the bottom. It is impossible to convey the experience in words; you needed to be there to appreciate it.

At another annual dinner in a West London pub Harry was Chairman for the evening. The main course was appalling old chicken and the meeting was subdued, very subdued by CSS standards. When the meal was over, Harry stood up to introduce a talk. "Our speaker tonight is Dr Anthony Sutcliffe of the Natural History Museum. He is a palaeontologist, that is he studies old bones and he has been very interested in our proceedings so far tonight." I have never before or since seen a change of mood among members so sudden and complete.

Harry's last decade and more were troubled by Parkinson's Disease, which he took with remarkable stoicism. At the 50th Anniversary dinner at The Manor he said to me that if you live long enough you'll probably get it.

His legacy is a still-thriving CSS with two properties for cavers' accommodation. Harry Pearman was a one-off and I for one am very grateful to have shared a few bits of my life with him.



*Roy, Harry and Heather at the 50th Anniversary Dinner.
Harry's humour keeps them laughing*

"The gorge ended abruptly at a 60 ft. blank wall, but at its base was the entrance to a cave, dark and wide as a railway tunnel. The dry river bed led inside, whence came the gurgling and rushing of mighty waters. Two diminutive figures advanced hesitantly into the gloom striking one match after another. The flickering shadows parted long enough to show exciting vaults leading off on either hand, with fluted rocks and stal flow.

The cave was Porth yr Ogof and the time, March 1955 and the figures, Bill Burgess and myself. I must say that until then I had considered caves only as features of numerous boys' books or places lit with electricity which one tramped round after a guide. I had of course the average member of the public's horror of potholing, which consisted of forcing oneself down tight crevices in the ground and having to be rescued by firemen.

Yet here was this cave, visited by chance on a day out from Storey Arms Youth Hostel. Its wide mouth and beckoning fingers of rock drew one into its timeless corridors and a subtle influence began to work between us with our box of matches and this now, undreamt of underworld."

The above is Harry Pearman's description of his first ever caving trip, which inspired him not only to take up caving but also to form the Chelsea Spelaeological Society with his fellow Chelsea-based cavers back in 1956.

(First published in CSS newsletter Volume 7 no 6 March 1965)

CSS MEETS 2019

April 19th-22nd - Easter in North Wales

Trips TBC

April 26th-28th - ODSS Working Weekend

Scaffolding and preparation for the upcoming re-roofing work.

May 24th-2nd June - Old Daren Sunday School re-roofing week

A week of working in the glorious Welsh sunshine, supping beer, and constructing a roof of magnificence that we can all enjoy. Helen has commandeered Saturday 1st of June to be our first CSS "Glamour Night" so bring your sequined outfits and classy cocktails. Suggested caving trips for this weekend are Little Neath River Cave and Ogof Rhyd Sych.

June 28th-30th - Whitewalls Summer BBQ

A fun packed weekend of caving and chargrilled food on the hillside.

July 4th-8th - NAMHO Conference Mid-Wales

This year the event is based in the village of Llanafan, Ceredigion. There are many excellent mine trips on offer including Frongoch, Bwlch Glas, Ystrad Einion, Cwmystwth, and many more. See

www.cambrianmines.co.uk/NAMHO_2019 for more details.

July 26th-28th - TBC

August 23rd-26th (Bank Holiday) - Caving in the North York Moors

Trips to include the Jenga/Excalibur Pot through trip, which has only been possible since 2015 and has some good unspoiled formations to see. Hopefully we should

also get the chance to visit a recently discovered jet mine, and Bogg Hall Rising, which has fish and an otter in residence (wetsuit needed). This will be a good weekend for doing some more unusual caving trips. In the absence of caving huts it's likely that we'll be camping, and Helen would appreciate it if people would let her know they're coming in plenty of time for her to organise this (bearing in mind this is a Bank Holiday Weekend and will be busier than usual).

September 6th-8th - Rescon Cave Rescue Conference - Mendip

This event will be an opportunity to gain knowledge in many aspects of cave rescue including First Aid and casualty care, technical rigging, and use of the comms. Workshops will be held both above and below ground. See www.caverescue.org.uk/bcrc-rescon-2019 for more information.

September - Hidden Earth

Date and venue TBC

October - TBC

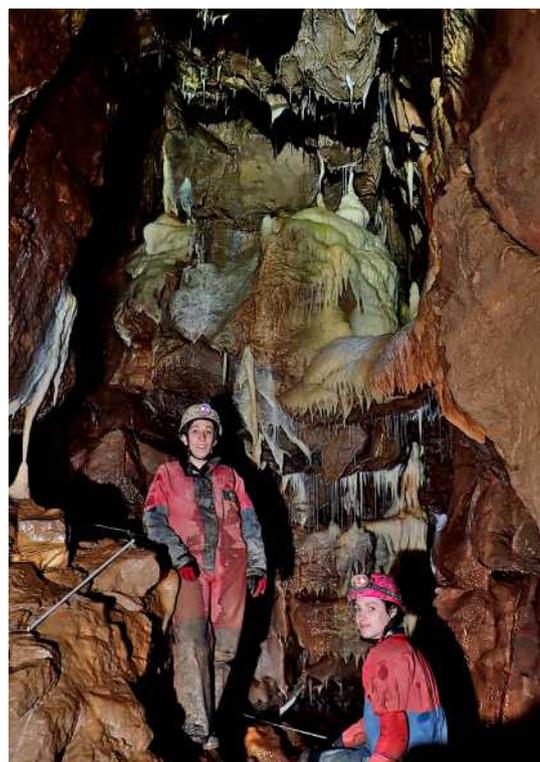
November 1st-3rd - Whitewalls Bonfire Weekend

A weekend of caving, fireworks, fire and feasting

December 6th-8th - Whitewalls Curry Weekend

A caving and home-cooked curry themed weekend.

More activities will be added throughout the year, so watch this space. For more information on any of the above trips please contact Helen Pemberton at heleninightingale@gmail.com



Photos by Matt Voysey

Wookey Hole and Shatter Cave - CSS Mendip Meet March 19

Dear CSS Editor,

It was a real pleasure to read about the club's Little Neath River Cave trip on the 8th of July 2018 in Volume 6 No's 7/8/9. I can almost recall my first youthful trip into Little Neath River Cave in 1974 with a competent leader, and I visited again in an immature team of two youngish cavers in about 1979 when there was a 'washed in' dead sheep to negotiate in the entrance series. Then a planned trip in April 2006 was aborted due to the high water in the entrance series so we diverted to visit Bridge Cave and White Lady Cave nearby instead. I was back in LNRC for good trips in May 2008, May 2009, May 2010 and again in May 2017. I like this cave very much, but you do need to be wary of the water levels and the weather forecast. Sue and I visited sometime in 2016 when the entrance was completely flooded from the riverbed (see photo). I look forward to my next trip to the cave during 2019 no doubt. Keep up the good work.

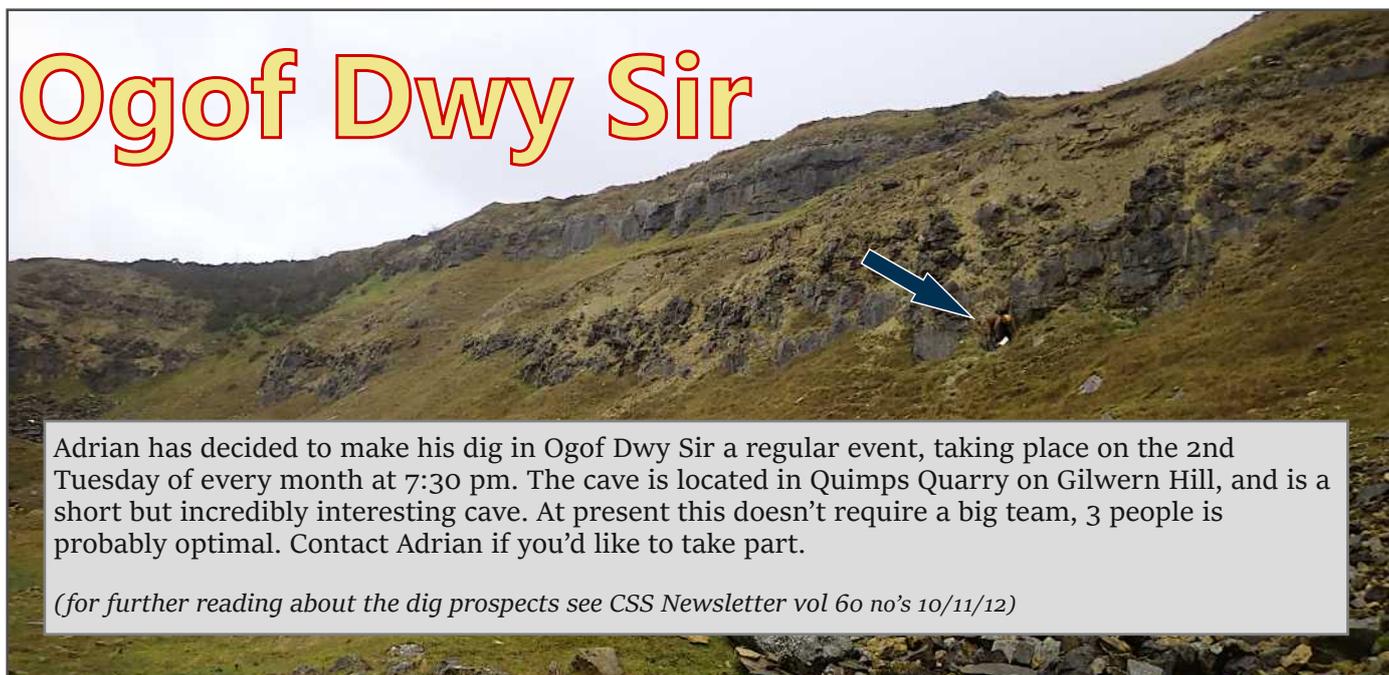


Regards Andy Watson.



P.S. If you come up the track from the parking area, cross the road and go up the footpath then head east up to near the top of the ridge there is a small abandoned dig in the limestone karst that my son and I discovered when I saw a drag tray in a cavity (see photo). I wonder who dug there?

Ogof Dwy Sir



Adrian has decided to make his dig in Ogof Dwy Sir a regular event, taking place on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at 7:30 pm. The cave is located in Quimps Quarry on Gilwern Hill, and is a short but incredibly interesting cave. At present this doesn't require a big team, 3 people is probably optimal. Contact Adrian if you'd like to take part.

(for further reading about the dig prospects see CSS Newsletter vol 60 no's 10/11/12)

Gear Review

by Adrian Fawcett

Silverline 361253 Heavy Duty Cable Puller

or 'If the boulder don't move Fawcett out'



Selected and purchased by Matt Chinner, this handy piece of kit was put to good use in Daren Cilau on the February 2019 HRC camp, at the Flyby Dig in Half Mile Passage. As previously described (see CSS Newsletter Vol 59, 7/8/9, page 48), this is an uphill dig into boulders which are (a) unstable,

(b) big enough to do you some harm, as Dave King will tell you, and (c) liable to chase you down the slope faster than you can run/crawl. Therefore, a mechanism to extract boulders at a distance was needed. Simply tying a rope around them was not effective. Boulders know when they're at an advantage, and obstinately refuse to budge. But faced with a puller capable of generating 2 tonnes of force they know who's boss and obligingly tumble down.

The winch basically consists of a lever attached to a cable reel with a ratchet mechanism. The body of the winch has a short length of galvanised steel cable attached, with a hook on the end. This we attached to a Petzl steel plate hanger, bolted to the wall. We chose a location a safe distance from the action with plenty of space to stand, and where sightseers could observe the action. A 5mm steel cable was connected between the winch and designated boulder by one of three methods:

1. Drilling a hole in the boulder and screwing in a bolt with plate hanger attached. Matt had obtained some self-tapping bolts that could be unscrewed afterwards – perfect for this application. Throughbolts are great, but you are unlikely to get them out again.
2. A wire or rope strop around the boulder. Where it was too risky to drill the rock, and it was possible to feed a strop around behind it, this was the quickest and easiest method. Do remember to screw up the attachment maillon though – an 8mm stainless one was seriously distorted by forgetting to do so.
3. A grappling hook placed in a crack between the boulder of interest and an adjoining rock surface. Not always possible, but again quick and easy when it works.

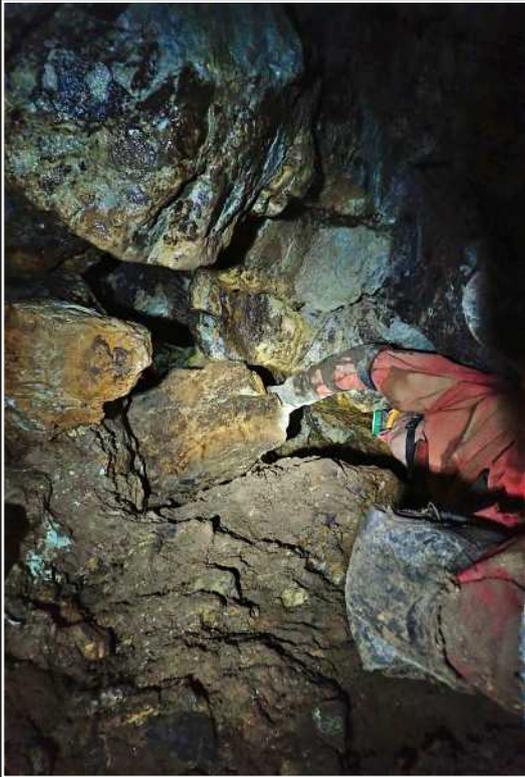
In each case, the way the applied force will cause the boulder to turn needs to be considered. Obviously, if it is pulled in a direction that will jam it more solidly, even two tonnes of force is not going to get it to budge.

Winching needs to be done with a little care. There is always a risk that the cable will snap, or will suddenly detach from the boulder. So, everyone kept the right side of the winch, and we hung a rope over the cable to help absorb the energy if it went suddenly. This may have been more psychological than truly effective – but since nothing failed dramatically we can only surmise.

After about 7 hours work, and no mishaps other than the bent maillon and a missing circlip, the choke looks far less intimidating and we can see a tantalising black space above. It's not absolutely clear what we try to move next, but with this new winch technology I think we are onto a winner. OK – so there was a little bit of cable slippage, the cable wouldn't always wind onto the reel neatly, sometimes the cable was the wrong length and wouldn't even pull tight, nothing had happened and the cable was tight and a struggle to release. But hey – who ever said cave digging was supposed to be a stroll in the park?

Once we're done with Flyby, there are some other boulder chokes in Daren Cilau that may not have defeated us after all...





*Above: Adrian in the boulder choke
 Top Right: Dave and Adrian at the winching station
 Bottom Right: "Really Mandy, the boulder was this big"*

Boulder winching in the Flyby dig, Daren Cilau



Portable Breakthrough

Recently un-earthed from a dig site in Mendip, this interesting rock nodule has been dubbed the "Portable Breakthrough" as it comes equipped with its own black void to aim for. Considered by some of the team as the most promising lead yet, this handy lump can be moved from one dig face to another with ease, to inspire enthusiasm for even the most un-yielding of digs. Apparently if you lift it to your ear, you can even hear a streamway!



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*Agen Allwedd
Photography by Matt Voysey*